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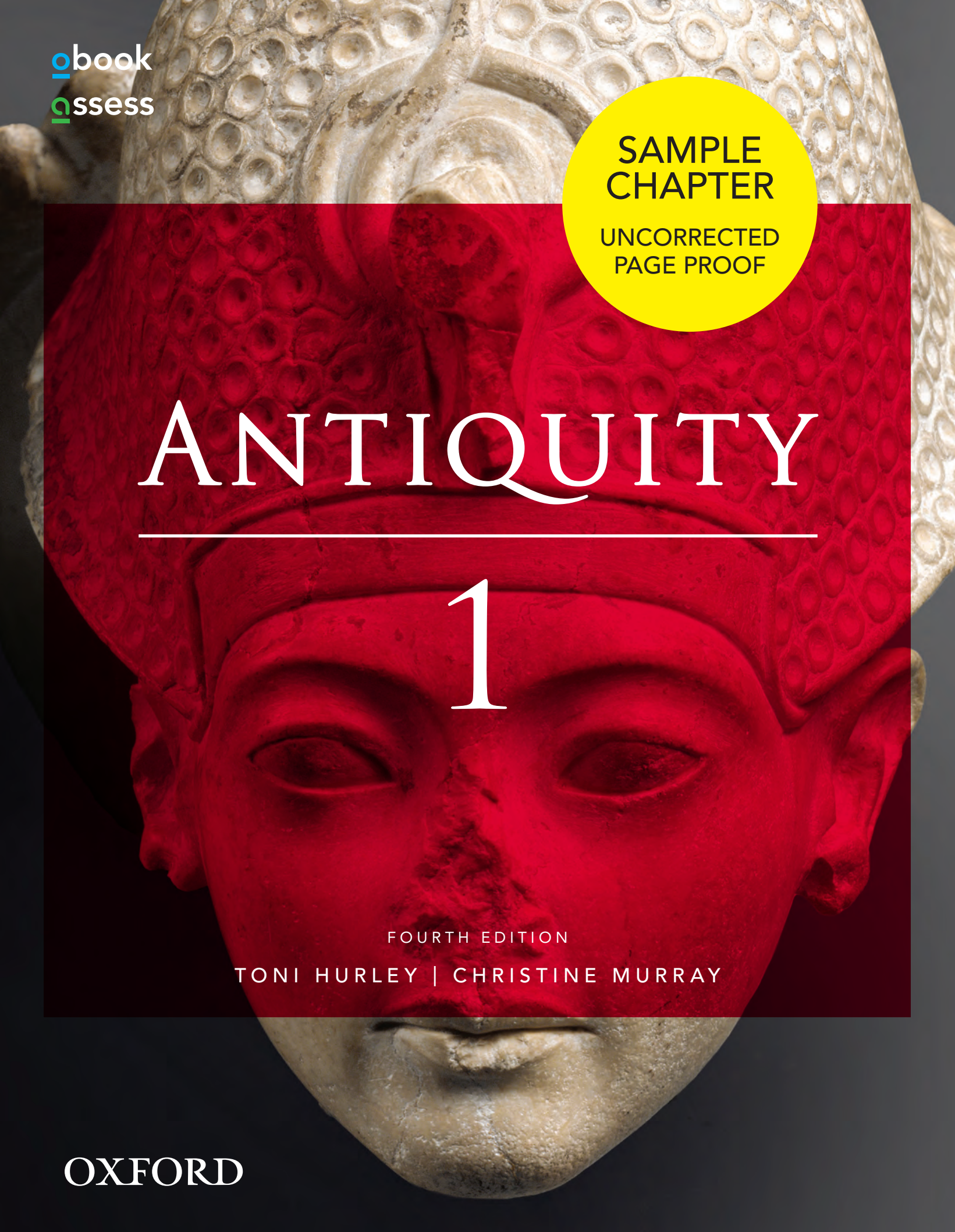

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TONI HURLEY | CHRISTINE MURRAY | PHILIPPA MEDCALF | JAN ROLPH

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Using Antiquity

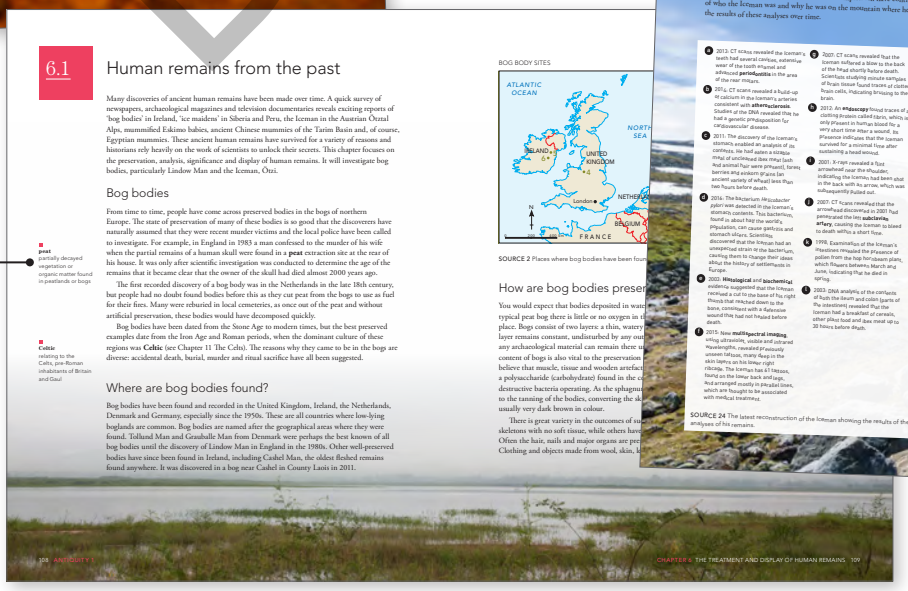
New South Wales' most trusted Ancient History series has been updated for the new Ancient History Stage 6 syllabus. The first of a two-volume series, *Antiquity 1* offers complete support for Year 11 teachers and their students, providing unparalleled depth and coverage and a range of new chapter features that will give students of all abilities the best chance of achieving success in Ancient History.

Key enhancements:

- All content has been explicitly aligned to the new Ancient History Stage 6 syllabus (Year 11).
- Subject experts, Toni Hurley and Christine Murray, have developed comprehensive, engaging and appropriately levelled content.
- Unambiguous language is used throughout the book, with visuals on every spread to engage students and support learning.
- obook assess provides comprehensive student and teacher digital support including answers to every question in the book, detailed teacher notes, support for assessment and exam preparation, videos and more.

'Focus questions', 'Focus concepts and skills', and 'Learning outcomes' are clearly stated at the beginning of each chapter to guide teachers and students through the content.

Content includes the latest scientific developments, up-to-date case studies, maps, and rich visual and written source material.



Margin glossary definitions help students easily find the meaning of unfamiliar words and assist with their understanding.

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Many chapters feature a 'Profile' which allows for more in-depth learning about a historically significant person, event or phenomenon.

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- the ability to set up classes, set assignments, monitor progress and graph results, and view all available content and resources in one place.

15

Palmyra and the Silk Road

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. How significant was the Silk Road in the history of Palmyra?
2. How was Palmyrene culture influenced by Eastern and Western traditions?
3. What do sources reveal of the relations between Palmyra and Rome?
4. What was Zenobia's role in the history of Palmyra?
5. Why is Palmyra significant in its own time and in the present?

FOCUS CONCEPTS & SKILLS

Significance

In studying the significance of Palmyra and the Silk Road, a critical consideration is its importance to different people in different times. For the people of Palmyra, its relationship to the Silk Road trade was perhaps the most important factor in its ancient history. For the Romans, this and other factors played a part in its changing significance. Today, Palmyra's significance is determined by very different circumstances.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Explain the importance of the Silk Road in the history of Palmyra.
2. Examine the effect of Eastern and Western traditions on Palmyrene culture.
3. Analyse the sources for evidence of the relations between Palmyra and Rome.
4. Examine Zenobia's role in the history of Palmyra.
5. Account for the significance of Palmyra in its own time and in the present.

SOURCE 1 The Monumental Arch at Palmyra before its destruction in 2015

15.1 Palmyra, trading post of the Silk Road

Palmyra, the 'city of palm trees', also known as Tadmur, was once one of the greatest cultural centres in the ancient world. Its location between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates River was critical to its development as a major trading city on the east–west trade route, the famed Silk Road. Local entrepreneurs maximised the advantages of their situation to create a trading enterprise that would enrich them all. They would go on to exchange goods with India via the Persian Gulf route and also with such cities as Coptos in Egypt, Rome and Dura-Europos in Syria.

The city is known from as early as the 19th century BC, but its first significant description comes from the 1st century AD, during a period of Roman control. The Roman naturalist and author Pliny described the city in his *Natural History.*

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SOURCE 2

Palmyra is a city famous for the beauty of its site, the riches of its soil, and the delicious quality and abundance of its water. Its fields are surrounded by sands on every side, and are thus separated, as it were, by nature from the rest of the world. Though placed between the two great empires of Rome and Parthia, it still maintains its independence; never failing, at the very first moment that a rupture between them is threatened, to attract the careful attention of both.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book V, 21.25

ANCIENT SYRIA, 1ST CENTURY AD

Source: Oxford University Press

SOURCE 3 Ancient Syria in the 1st century AD showing the location of Palmyra

SOURCE 4 The mountain range to the north of Palmyra, one of the city's natural barriers

DRAFT

Palmyra has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for its outstanding universal value. Its citation emphasises the unique architecture of the city, which synthesises Graeco-Roman techniques with Palmyrene art and Persian influences. The remains of its beautiful buildings have drawn the admiration of travellers for hundreds of years, but today its future is uncertain. The very location that enabled Palmyra to become the trading post of the Silk Road puts it in the middle of a modern war that is highly destructive of both life and heritage.

Geography

Palmyra is a palm-fringed oasis in the Tadmorean Desert surrounded by natural barriers. These include the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains to the north, west and south-west, which cut it off from the Mediterranean coast. To the east and south is the Syrian Desert and the modern countries of Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The great Euphrates and Tigris rivers lie to the east of Palmyra. At the height of the Palmyrene Empire, the Euphrates provided the means for the transport of goods coming up the Persian Gulf from India and countries further east. A small **wadi**, the Wadi al-Qubur, stretches from the western hills past the city before entering the eastern gardens of the oasis. The Efqa spring, to the south, important in ancient times, no longer exists.

wadi
a river valley that is dry except when it rains

15.1 Understanding and using the sources

1 According to Pliny, what are the natural advantages of Palmyra's location?
2 What comment does Pliny make about Palmyra's location? What potential problem might arise from this?

15.1 Check your learning

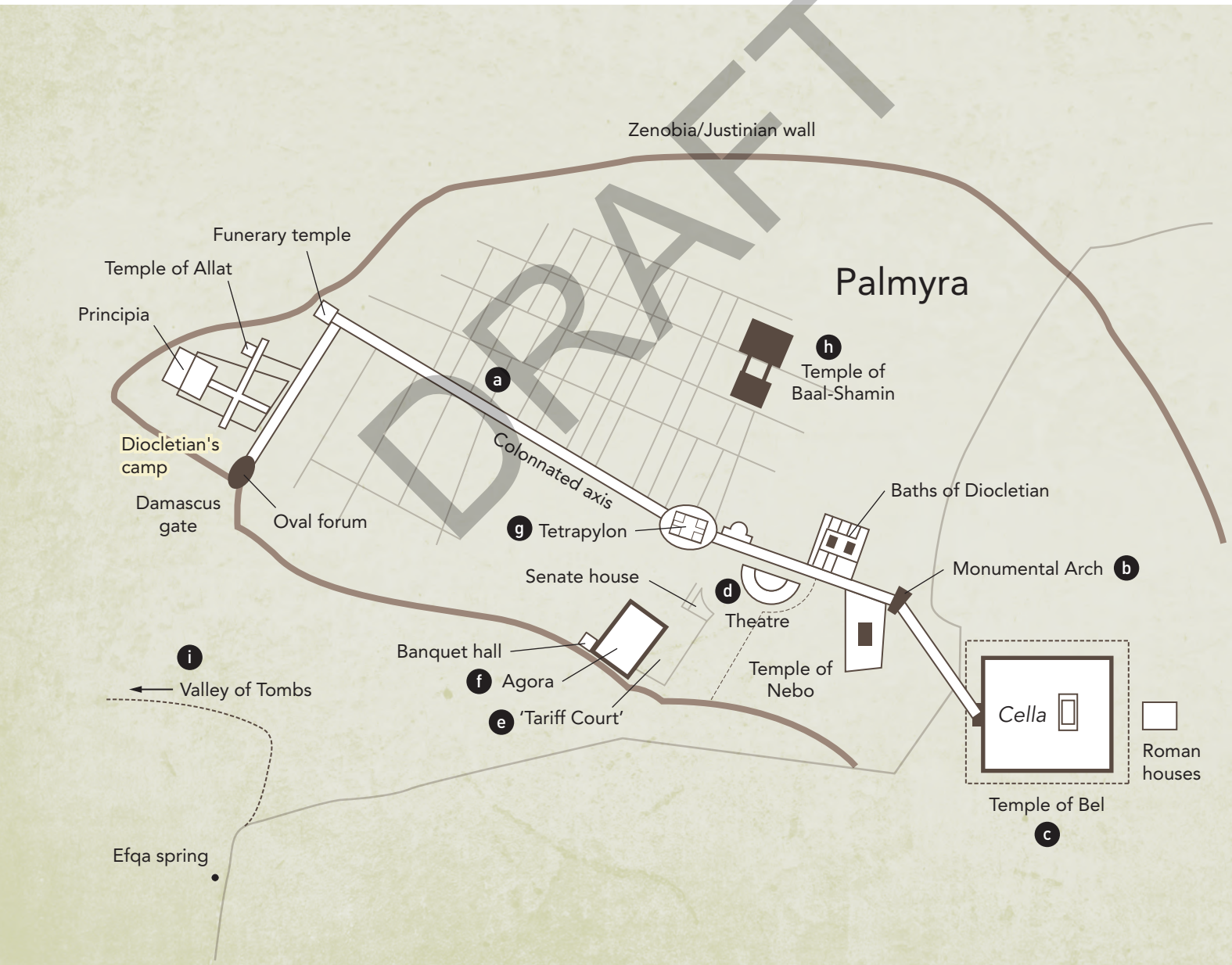
1 What features of Palmyra's geographical location contributed to its success as a trading post?
2 Watch a brief introductory film on Palmyra by entering 'UNESCO Site of Palmyra video' in your browser.

15.2 Layout and architectural features of Palmyra

Corinthian referring to an order of architecture in which the columns were slender and fluted, and the capitals incorporated sculpted leaves

Palmyra had its beginnings close to the Efqa spring on the southern bank of the Wadi al-Qubur. By the 1st century AD, most of the important monumental structures that came with Palmyra's growth in wealth were on the northern bank of the wadi. Source 5 contains a plan of the site's layout, and some images and information about the main structures.

SOURCE 5 A plan of Palmyra



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15.2 Check your learning

1 Study the plan of Palmyra in Source 5. Using the Google Earth website or app, locate 'Palmyra, Temple of Bel, Syria'. Turn on 3D Buildings, Wikipedia and 360 Cities to tour the site and access information on the buildings. If you do not have access to Google Earth you can use an encyclopaedia, actual or online, to find the information.

2 Create your own table using the headings below. Record all the information you find about the buildings and structures shown in Source 5. Other useful websites include:

- Encyclopaedia Britannica, Palmyra
- Khan Academy, Temple of Bel, Palmyra
- Palmyra: a Pleiades place resource.

BUILDING	IMAGES	FEATURES	ROLE IN EVERYDAY LIFE	SIGNIFICANCE

3 Share your files with your class or turn them into a presentation. You can use your school's intranet, a class Wiki or Google Classroom, or use Prezi, PowerPoint or other presentation software.

orchestra
the large circular floor of a theatre

cella
the inner area of an ancient temple

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a

Great Colonnade: a colonnaded avenue linking the Temple of Bel to the West Gate, via the Monumental Gate. The columns were **Corinthian** in style and featured decorated, inscribed brackets for the placement of statues.

b

Monumental Arch: built in the 3rd century AD during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, maybe to commemorate victory over the Parthians, it linked the Colonnade and the Temple of Bel. It was decorated with stone carvings of plants and geometrical designs.

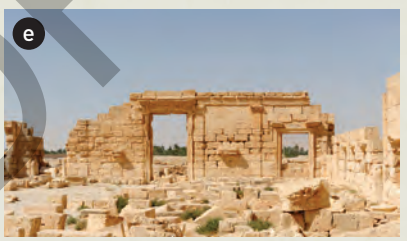
c

Temple of Bel: the rectangular temple was built in the middle of a paved court surrounded by a 205-metre-long wall. The **cella**, surrounded by Corinthian columns, had inner sanctuaries dedicated to Bel and other deities, two pairs of high windows and stairs leading to rooftop terraces.

d

Theatre: built in the 2nd century AD, the theatre's main entrance led to a stone-paved **orchestra** surrounded by a circular wall. The proscenium, or rear wall, had columned, rectangular and curved niches. The stage was reached by two staircases.

e



Tariff Court: a courtyard with a huge entrance doorway big enough for camels to enter. The 5-metre-long stone slab, the Tariff of Palmyra, bearing the tax requirements for goods coming in and going out of the city, was found here.

f

Agora: a huge structure with 11 entrances, it had 200 column bases for the placement of statues of important citizens. The complex included the tariff court and the *triclinium* or banquet hall.

g

Tetrapylon: erected by Diocletian at the end of the 3rd century AD. There were groups of four pink granite columns at the corners of a square platform. Each group of columns was topped by a cornice and contained a statue on a pedestal.

h

Temple of Baal Shamin: begun in the late 2nd century BC, it was added to in AD 115 and largely rebuilt in AD 131. It had a central cella and two colonnaded courtyards featuring Corinthian columns.

i

Valley of Tombs: located on the outskirts of the city on the road from Emesa, modern-day Homs, the valley features numerous tower tombs and underground tombs or *hypogea*.

15.3 Historical context of Palmyra

Palmyra's location meant that it was subject to the fortunes of the major powers that established their empires in the Mesopotamian region. In the Hellenistic period (312–64 BC), it was subject to the **Seleucid** Kingdom. When the Romans **annexed** the Seleucid Kingdom in the 1st century AD, it became a subject of the Roman Empire, but maintained its independent status.

The timeline in Source 6 summarises the history of Palmyra from its beginnings until the Muslim conquest in the 7th century AD.

Seleucid
relating to a dynasty that ruled over Syria and a great part of western Asia from 312 to 64 BC

annex
to incorporate, add territory to a country or state, often by military means

tributary
a state that pays tribute to another state or ruler

garrison
troops stationed in a fortress or town to defend it

BC	• Initially called Tadmur • 312—64 BC – Hellenistic period; Palmyra incorporated into the Seleucid Kingdom • 64 BC – Roman Republic annexes the Seleucid Kingdom; Palmyra remains independent • Is an indispensable staging post for caravans travelling between the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia and Arabia • 42 BC – Roman general Mark Antony attacks
1ST - 2ND CENTURIES AD	• Becomes a buffer between Rome and Parthia; keeps the east–west trade routes open • AD 14 – Becomes a **tributary** of the Roman Empire, included in province of Syria; retains much independence, a prosperous period; called 'Palmyra' by Rome • AD 129 – Visited by emperor Hadrian and declared a 'free city'; sets and collects its own taxes • AD 167 – Roman **garrison** established • AD 109 – Assigned to the province of Phoenicia; trade affected by Roman-Parthian war
3RD CENTURY AD	• AD 212 – Made a Roman *colonia* or colony under Emperor Caracalla • AD 229 – Visited by Emperor Severus Alexander • AD 256 – Emperor Valerian gives Odaenathus the title 'Corrector of the East' and charge of Roman forces • AD 267 – Odaenathus and son assassinated; his wife, Zenobia, assumes power and defeats many neighbours • AD 271 – Palmyra besieged by Emperor Aurelian; Zenobia escapes but is captured by Romans • AD 273 – Palmyrenes massacre 600 Roman archers; Aurelian's legionaries retaliate, razing the city and slaughtering the citizens. Palmyra never recovers
4TH - 7TH CENTURIES AD	• AD 303 – Emperor Diocletian fortifies Palmyra as a stronghold on the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. • AD 312 – Roman emperor Constantine converts to Christianity. • AD 325 – Palmyra becomes a Christian city; record of a bishop in residence • AD 527 – Emperor Justinian rebuilds Palmyra's defences; city now primarily a military outpost • AD 634 – Palmyra conquered by a Muslim army led by Khaled ibn al-Walid

SOURCE 6
A timeline of key developments in Palmyra's history

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15.3 Check your learning

1 What evidence is there that the Romans valued Palmyra?
2 What does the eventual Muslim conquest of Palmyra reveal about the importance of the city?

15.4 The Silk Road

The Silk Road was a network of trade routes that linked many regions of the ancient world. Historians sometimes prefer the term 'Silk Routes' because it was made up of several routes by which goods made their way from China in the East to a variety of destinations in the West. It is thought that the first contact between China and the West occurred around 200 BC. By 130 BC, the Silk Road was in operation after Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty recognised the value of trade with the West after seeing the superiority of Western horses.

The Silk Road routes began in China and extended through India, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia to Egypt, Africa, Greece, Rome and Britain. By these routes, the West gained paper, gunpowder, spices and especially Chinese silk, which was highly prized in Rome. In return, the East obtained goods such as gold, wool and horses from the West. Along with these commodities came culture: art, religion, philosophy, technology, language, science and architecture.

Silk Road goods were usually carried overland by camels. Different caravans carried goods through different sections of the road. Sea routes were also used for transporting goods between the East and West. Advances in shipbuilding and navigation enabled sea routes to be opened to areas in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

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THE SILK ROAD

Source: Oxford University Press

SOURCE 7 The Silk Road, showing both overland and sea routes that connected Palmyra to the East and West

Palmyra, caravan city

It was the development of its caravan trade that made Palmyra a city. Our evidence for this comes from inscriptions found on the site (see 15.5 Trade and economy in Palmrya). The big rise in Palmyra's importance coincided with the Roman conquest of Syria. Palmyra first became a tributary city of Rome with a garrison in AD 19. Rome's attempts to conquer Parthia 100 years later caused trouble for Palmyra because it depended on peace between the two powers for the caravan trade to thrive. The desired peace was restored and Palmyra, as a 'free city' and later a *colonia,* could set and collect its own taxes and have its own forms of government.

The uneasy peace between Rome and Parthia meant that Palmyra occupied what was a type of no man's land with a network of caravan routes. Palmyra profited from both the Roman demand for Eastern luxuries such as silks and spices, and the Parthian desire for the goods of the West. Palmyrene traders became the middlemen in this highly profitable trade.

The traditional view of Palmyra's role in the caravan trade is that it profited from its fortunate location, at the hub of the caravan routes. A modern scholar, Gary Young, disputes this, arguing that the Palmyrenes were not just in the right place at the right time, but rather they acted as entrepreneurs, providing incentives for traders to re-route their caravans through their city. The route across the desert from the Euphrates via the oasis of Palmyra was not the usual one for caravans travelling from Mesopotamia to the Roman East, which had gone through Damascus (see Source 3). Young points out that the desert around Palmyra does not have a good supply of food and water, essential for desert travel. He continues his argument in Source 8.

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SOURCE 8

For Palmyra to become a commercial success required the Palmyrenes to create a trade route which passed through their city … The picture that we … have of the development of Palmyrene commerce is not that of the city benefitting from its fortuitous location on the trade route. Rather we see the merchants of this oasis city, in concert with the landowning aristocracy of the town, deliberately utilising the city's qualities and contacts with the surrounding tribes to *develop* a trade route which enabled them to prosper.

Gary K. Young, Rome's Eastern Trade: *International Commerce and Imperial Policy*, 31 BC–AD 305, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 124

15.4 Understanding and using the sources

1 What is the traditional view of Palmyra's role in the caravan trade of its region?
2 What is Young's argument in Source 8 about the way in which Palmyra became an important trading city?

15.4 Check your learning

1 What incentives might Palmyra have offered traders to encourage them to divert their routes through Palmyra?
2 Go online to watch some clips from the BBC film *The Silk Road* to consolidate your understanding.

15.5 Trade and economy in Palmyra

An important source of evidence for Palmyrene trade comes from over 2000 inscriptions found on the site, commemorating individuals who assisted the formation and operation of the caravans. The inscriptions were placed on the plinths or pedestals of statues in their honour, which were erected along the Great Colonnade or in the Agora (see Source 5). Written in both Greek and the Palmyrene **dialect** of **Aramaic**, they record the names of some of the caravan chiefs who were members of the city's elite. Source 9 is an example.

dialect
a particular form of a language that is peculiar to a specific region or social group

Aramaic
a Semitic language originally of the ancient Arameans, but which came to be used widely by non-Aramean peoples throughout south-west Asia

SOURCE 9

Statue of Marcus Ulpius Yarhai, son of Hairan, son of Abgar, dedicated by the caravan that came from Charax Spasinou, as he has helped in all things, in his honor, during the time that Zabdela, son of Yadaya, was chief of the caravan. In the month Adar, year 480.

Statue inscription, cited in Albert Dien, 'Palmyra as a caravan city', *The Silk Road*, vol. 2, issue 1, June 2004, p. 23

The inscriptions reveal that Palmyrene merchants set up branches in other cities, some as far away as Rome and Egypt. Palmyra is also recorded as maintaining archers mounted on camels and horses to protect caravans against bandits among the desert nomads. Although there are several such inscriptions, they give little information on the nature of the goods carried. However, they do give some evidence about trade routes. For example, one route went from Charax on the Persian Gulf, along the Euphrates River to a river port such as Dura-Europos and then overland to Palmyra (see Source 7). Two inscriptions record ships owned by Palmyrenes that arrived from north-west India. In fact, the route from China preferred by the Palmyrenes seems to have been via the Indian ports and up the Persian Gulf rather than overland through Iran and central Asia. Caravans starting at Palmyra took the same route in reverse. Some inscriptions mention Palmyrene merchants embarking at Charax and sailing to the ports of northern India to engage in trade. Several funerary reliefs from Palmyra depict ships as well as the tomb owners.

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Caravan organisation

The Palmyrene inscriptions reveal a little of the organisation of caravans and the types of Palmyrene citizens who were involved in the caravan trade. There appear to have been a few roles undertaken, particularly:

- the *synodiarch* – the commander or leader of the caravan, later called the *archemporos*. He was a professional or expert in caravan organisation who was hired by a group of merchants to assemble the caravan and conduct it to its destination and back again. He would have been responsible for securing food and water supplies.
- the *strategoi* – the people responsible for the caravan's security, usually an armed escort. They would have carried out diplomatic negotiations with the relevant authorities to smooth the passage of the caravan along its route.

Some scholars have argued for a further role, that of the caravan patron. According to this view, the patron was likely to have been an entrepreneur, the person who provided the funds, the animals and, when needed, the armed escort to make sure that the caravan reached its destination safely. Marcus Ulpius Yarhai (referred to in Source 9) is thought to have been a patron.

More recently, another reconstruction of the evidence has been suggested. This view argues that the person who provided the financial backing, the logistical support and led the caravan was likely to have been the *synodiarch* himself. An inscription from the 3rd century AD recording a person called Julius Aurelius Salamallat, who returned a caravan to Palmyra and paid for it himself, seems to support this view. He must have been a rich, influential man to accomplish this, which suggests that caravan leaders could have been wealthy enough to mount a caravan expedition without the backing of a patron. It might have been the case that when some merchants wished to send their goods on a trading caravan, they would approach one of the wealthy men of Palmyra. He would organise the caravan and lead it himself. The inscriptions, then, were a method by which the merchants could display their gratitude to the caravan leaders, especially if they did something out of the ordinary to help them.

The Tariff of Palmyra

The permission granted by the emperor Hadrian to Palmyra to set and collect its own taxes when he declared it a 'free city' in AD 129 was the background for the first customs tariff. The Tariff of Palmyra, the *Portoria Palmyrenorum*, was engraved on a large stone slab or stele measuring 175 by 480 centimetres and dates to AD 137. It was set up in the tariff court within the Agora in Palmyra and lists the various municipal taxes payable on imports and exports of the caravan trade, as well as different types of merchandise in the market. The greatest revenue was derived from customs duties (or taxes) on items such as laden and unladen camels, fat, salted provisions, leather, wine, corn, straw and pine cones. Source 11 is an extract from the Tariff of Palmyra.

SOURCE 10
A modern camel caravan travelling on the Silk Road in China

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SOURCE 11

§1 From those who import male slaves into Tadmor or its territory, the Customs agent shall collect 22 denarii per slave.

§2 For each slave exported, 22 denarii.

§5 The Customs agent himself shall levy a duty in respect of each camel load: 3 denarii for each camel-load entering Tadmor, and 3 denarii for each camel-load leaving Tadmor.

§6 For each donkey-load imported or exported, he shall collect 1 denarius.

§7 Wool dyed purple. For each fleece imported or exported, 3 denarii.

§8 For each camel-load of aromatic oil imported in alabaster jars, 25 denarii.

…

§13 Per camel-load of olive oil comprising four goatskin bags, 10 denarii at importation and exportation.

Hironori Asakura, 'Customs Tarriff of Palmyra', *World History of the Customs and Tariffs, Brussels:* World Customs Organization, 2003, p. 70

The caravan trade was not the only source of income available to Palmyra. For example, farming and animal herding were known to have taken place to the north-west of the city. Crops grown include barley, figs, olives and pistachios. It is thought that the city owned most of the land and that grazing taxes were levied on pastoralists.

The Tariff of Palmyra in the Hermitage Museum

The Tariff of Palmyra was discovered in 1881 by a Russian traveller and amateur archaeologist, who published the inscription in 1884. At that time, Syria was a province of the Ottoman Empire, which gave permission for the tariff to be transported to the Imperial Hermitage in Saint Petersburg to be studied. The stele has been held in the Hermitage since 1903.

SOURCE 12 The remains of the Tariff of Palmyra at the Hermitage museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia

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15.5 Understanding and using the sources

1 According to Source 9, what did Marcus Ulpius Yarhai do to deserve a statue in his honour?
2 Who else is mentioned in the source? What was their role?
3 Using Source 11, what is the most valuable import or export? Why?
4 Why would a woollen fleece dyed purple have been so valuable?

15.5 Check your learning

1 Read the full text of the Tariff of Palmyra. Enter 'MIT Palmyra tax law' in your browser.
2 Find out what a denarius would be worth in today's currency. Use it to calculate the value of one purple-dyed woollen fleece and one camel load of olive oil.
3 Research the purple dye industry of the ancient world. What was its significance?

15.6 Cultural exchange: East meets West in Palmyra

Palmyra's location between the East and the West was reflected in its culture. The Eastern cultures included those of the countries to the east of Palmyra, including the Parthian Empire, China and India. To the west were Egypt, Greece and Rome. The language, religion, art and architecture of Palmyra all reflect the various influences of these cultures.

Language

Palmyra was a bilingual city, its two languages being Greek and a Palmyrene dialect of Aramaic. Other languages such as Arabic would have been heard in the bazaars and temples, spoken by the many people living in the city connected to its trading pursuits. Despite the connection with Rome for a large part of its history, Latin was not in common use. The few Latin inscriptions come from the later years of the city. Palmyra had two systems of writing – a monumental script and Mesopotamian **cursive**. Evidence comes from over 2000 inscriptions found throughout the city, especially the bilingual inscription on the Tariff of Palmyra. The use of a local language in inscriptions was unparallelled in Roman Syria and reflects the unusual status the city enjoyed within the empire.

cursive
a script that has joined characters

bas-relief
a type of sculpture in which the figures are raised up from a flat background to give a 3D effect

frontality
the depiction of the front view of figures or objects in a work of art

Art

The art of Palmyra was clearly influenced by Greek and, later, Roman art, but like other features of Palmyrene culture it had its own individual style. Artists did not attempt to convey personal characteristics of the people or gods they were depicting, resulting in forms that are stiff and rigid. **Bas-relief** was the common form of sculpture and statues tended to be two-dimensional, static and often used architecturally, placed against pillars or walls. The best examples are the reliefs of the deceased that formed part of the decoration of family mausoleums.

Palmyrene funerary reliefs show a fusion of eastern and western influences. The funerary banquet was a Roman motif, but the subjects are often shown wearing Greek or sometimes Parthian dress. The **frontality** could have been derived from Egypt, or from Parthia or even Syria. Persian and Eastern influences can be seen in the large eyes with two concentric circles to mark the pupils and are also present in the heavily ornate jewellery.

SOURCE 13 A sculptured relief of the funeral banquet of Marle and Bolaia from Palmyra, 2nd century AD

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Architecture

The architecture of Palmyra is also reflective of Eastern and Western influences. Evidence of early architecture, mostly deposits of architectural mouldings, capitals and other fragments in the Hellenistic style, comes from the 1st century BC. The early years of the 1st century AD saw a change in orientation that can be seen best in the Temple of Bel, which was dedicated in AD 32, but was added to over the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. The temple's ground plan comes from the Eastern ritual tradition. For example, the cella features a bent-axis approach to the main shrine, which would have required priests celebrating the ritual to make a 90-degree turn after entering the sanctuary in order to approach the offering table. Other architectural elements of the temple, however, are Graeco-Roman, such as the fluted Corinthian columns and the decoration of the **frieze** and roofline. The temple bears masons' marks and graffiti made by artisans of various backgrounds, including Greeks, Romans and local Palmyrenes.

frieze
a wide, horizontal band of decoration, either of a painting or a sculpture, on a wall

Religion

The religion of Palmyra seems to have been influenced mainly by the East. Its two main deities belonged to two different Eastern traditions: Baal Shamin was Syro-Phoenician in origin, while Bel was Mesopotamian, related to Bel Marduk, the major god of the Babylonian **pantheon**. The cult of Nabu at Palmyra was also Babylonian, associated with Marduk, and a number of other Babylonian deities such as Nanai and Herta were honoured in Palmyra.

pantheon
all the gods of a people or religion

Palmyra had deities of its own, such as the guardian of the spring, Yarhibol; the god of the sun, Malakbel; and the moon god, Aglibol. Deities from neighbouring regions were also worshipped in Palmyra, including Astarte, Baal Hamon and Atargatis. The Arab deities worshipped include Azizos and Allat. A statue of Allat in which she strongly resembles the Greek goddess Athena has been found. Arab people living in the countryside seem to have worshipped camel and horse-riding gods with Arab names. These have also been found in the city, showing the cultural influence of the semi-nomadic desert Arab tribes on the religion of Palmyra.

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SOURCE 14
A 1st-century AD limestone sculpture of the Palmyrene gods Baal Shamin (centre), Aglibol (left) and Malakbel (right)

SOURCE 15 A summary of Eastern and Western influences on Palmyra

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15.6 Understanding and using the sources

1 List the features of Palmyrene art that can be identified in Sources 13 and 14.

2 Using Source 5, identify the different cultural influences on the architecture of Palmyra.

15.6 Check your learning

1 Draw up a diagram that summarises the information in Source 15 using the categories 'Eastern' and 'Western'. You might like to divide them further into categories such as Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Parthian and so on.

2 Using what you have learnt in this section, write a response to the following question: 'How was Palmyrene culture affected by Eastern and Western traditions?' (Explain: Relate cause and effect, make the relationships between things evident, provide why and/or how.)

To help you plan your response:

- identify the aspects of the topic you will address, e.g. art, religion, or Greek, Roman, Babylonian etc.
- use these aspects to structure your answer
- show how aspects of Palmyrene culture were affected by Eastern and Western traditions
- use specific evidence from the sources to support your discussion.

15.7 Palmyra and Rome

Palmyra had a long and varied association with Rome. Palmyra's strategic position in the Middle East between the might of Rome and whichever power ruled the east was always going to determine its future. The city's role in east–west trade was only part of the power relations that existed in this period. While Palmyra's interests coincided with those of Rome, it enjoyed a degree of independence; however, if those interests came into conflict with Roman interests, as would happen in time, that independence would be threatened.

One of Palmyra's earliest contacts with Rome dates to the 1st century BC. When the Roman general Pompey established the province of Syria in 64 BC, after **annexing** the Seleucid Kingdom, Palmyra managed to remain independent. By 41 BC, the situation had changed, and we have the first literary evidence of the city when it appears in the Roman historian Appian's record of an attack by Mark Antony, another Roman general.

SOURCE 16

… Antony sent a cavalry force to Palmyra, situated not far from the Euphrates, to plunder it, bringing the trifling accusation against its inhabitants, that being on the frontier between the Romans and the Parthians, they had avoided taking sides between them; for, being merchants, they bring the products of India and Arabia from Persia and dispose of them in the Roman territory; but in fact, Antony's intention was to enrich his horsemen. However, the Palmyreans were forewarned and they transported their property across the river, and, stationing themselves on the bank, prepared to shoot anybody who should attack them, for they are expert bowmen. The cavalry found nothing in the city. They turned round and came back, having met no foe, and empty-handed.

Appian, *The Histories*

Around AD 14, Palmyra was annexed by Rome and was included in the province of Syria as a tributary city. Far from being a negative event, this marked a period of prosperity and privileged status for the city and the region it controlled. Although a Roman legion was stationed at Palmyra soon after its annexation, no officials were sent to govern the city. It was during this period that Palmyra developed into a major trading city with a network of merchants working in what were effectively Palmyrene colonies in neighbouring trading cities.

The emperor Hadrian visited Palmyra in AD 129 and declared it a free city. This status gave the city the right to set and collect its own taxes. Later in the century, garrisons were stationed there, including a cavalry division. When the **Severan** dynasty established a new province in the area called Syria Phoenice, late in the century, Palmyra was included in it. The city was given preferential treatment, seen in its elevation to the status of a *colonia*, and the replacement of Greek governmental institutions with Roman ones. The citizens of Palmyra gained equal rights with those of Rome and, significantly, were exempted from paying taxes to Rome. It was during this time that the Great Colonnade was enlarged and more temples were erected. In AD 229, the emperor Severus Alexander visited the city.

Severan
a Roman imperial dynasty founded by the Roman general Septimius Severus, in power over the Roman Empire between 193 and 235 AD

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Odaenathus, King of Palmyra

consular relating to an ancient Roman consul, who was one of two annually elected chief magistrates in the Roman government

Septimius Odaenathus was a member of Palmyra's ruling family and a Roman citizen who had attained **consular** rank before becoming the first king of the Palmyrene kingdom in AD 260.

In AD 224, thirty-six years before Odaenathus became king, the Persians established the Sassanid monarchy, which would go on to be a stronger enemy of Rome than the Parthians had been. This new power situation greatly disrupted the eastern caravan trade with its frequent military campaigns against the Romans. In the middle of the 3rd century, the Persian king Shapur I launched a series of invasions of Roman territory, which culminated in the defeat and capture of Emperor Valerian in AD 260. At this time, Dura-Europos, the important city on the Euphrates River, was captured and destroyed by the Persians. Palmyrene trading outposts along the Euphrates were also lost. Palmyra was therefore threatened militarily and commercially. The Roman authorities were unable to send assistance and Palmyra no doubt felt that, to survive, it had to take action.

Odaenathus, maintaining his loyalty to Rome, formed an army of Palmyrenes and Syrian peasants to fight against Shapur I. In AD 260, he attacked and defeated Shapur I's army as it was returning home from an expedition, preventing it from crossing back over the Euphrates. He then sided with Valerian's son and successor, Gallienus, who was facing a rebellion and quashed it. As a result, Odaenathus restored a deteriorating situation in the East, and preserved Roman rule. He was given the title *corrector totius Orientis* ('governor of all the East') and although Palmyra officially remained part of the Roman empire, it actually became a Roman allied state instead of a provincial city. Odaenathus' loyalty to Rome paid off in the increasing status of Palmyra in the empire.

A question regarding the source of Odaenathus' military power has been raised by some historians. It is thought that his troops would have originally been from Palmyra itself, probably the caravan police, or militia. This would have provided him with experienced troops, which he could expand into a larger force. Eventually, regular Roman troops in the area would have come under his command as well. With these forces, Odaenathus reclaimed all Roman lands that had been occupied by the Persians since AD 252. He then declared himself king of Palmyra and, in time, 'king of kings', and crowned his son Hairin I as co-ruler. By AD 263, Odaenathus' kingdom of Palmyra effectively controlled the **Levant**, Mesopotamia and eastern Anatolia (see Source 3).

Levant the countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean Sea, considered to extend from Greece to Egypt

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SOURCE 17 A limestone bust thought to be of Odaenathus, from Palmyra c. AD 230–250

Odaenathus' rapid rise to power came to a sudden end when he and his son Hairin I were assassinated in AD 267 as they were returning from a campaign in Asia Minor. He was succeeded by his younger son, Vaballathus, the child of his second wife, Zenobia. Odaenathus' achievements are recorded in the *Historia Augusta*, a late Roman collection of biographies. Source 18 is an extract from the biography of the Roman emperor Gallienus.

SOURCE 18

One excellent deed of his [Gallienus], to be sure, is mentioned with praise. For in the consulship of his brother Valerian and his kinsman Lucillus, when he learned that Odaenathus had ravaged the Persians, brought Nisibis and Carrhae under the sway of Rome, made all of Mesopotamia ours, and finally arrived at Ctesiphon, put the king to flight, captured the **satraps** and killed large numbers of Persians, he gave him a share in the imperial power, conferred on him the name Augustus, and ordered coins to be struck in his honour, which showed him **haling** the Persians into captivity. This measure the senate, the city, and men of every age received with approval.

Unknown, *Historia Augusta*

satrap
a provincial governor in the ancient Persian Empire

haling
dragging forcibly

15.7 Understanding and using the sources

1. In Source 16, how did Mark Antony justify his attack on Palmyra?
2. What did the Palmyrene merchants do when they were warned of Mark Antony's approach?
3. What does this suggest about the development of Palmyra at this stage of its history?
4. Using Source 18, list the deeds that earned Odaenathus the praise of the Romans.
5. What rewards did he receive? What was the significance of giving him the title 'Augustus'?

15.7 Check your learning

1. What was the importance of Syria in the Roman Empire in 41 BC?
2. What special privileges did Rome grant to Palmyra? Why?
3. Complete a sequence chart to record the main events in Palmyra's relationship with Rome from 41 BC to the death of Odaenathus.
4. Find out about Odaenathus' administration of Palmyra. How was the city governed while Odaenathus was engaged in his many military campaigns?
5. There is much debate about who was responsible for Odaenathus' assassination. Research the theories and decide which one you think is most likely. Enter 'Odaenathus assassination' in your browser.

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15.8 Queen Zenobia

Zenobia, queen of the Palmyrene Empire in the 3rd century AD, challenged the authority of Rome in the period known as the Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235–284). Under her leadership, Palmyra would achieve its greatest power and influence, if only for a brief time.

Zenobia came from a noble Palmyrene family and was the second wife of Odaenathus, the first king of Palmyra. After her husband's assassination in AD 267, Zenobia became **regent** for her young son, Vaballathus. She went on to exercise considerable power in her own right. She claimed ancestry from Dido of Carthage as well as Cleopatra VII of Egypt. Several ancient sources record her life and period of power, including the historian Zosimus (c. AD 490) and the *Historia Augusta* (c. 4th century AD).

regent
a person appointed to rule in the place of a monarch who is a minor

In the early years of Zenobia's ascendancy, it was likely that she continued to rule the territories that had been under her husband's control. There appears to have been no local opposition to her assumption of power. However, at some point the queen decided to strengthen her authority by military means. Whatever her motivation, Zenobia sent her forces to attack Bosra, capital of the province of Arabia Petraea. The attack was successful and the Roman governor was killed.

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PALMYRENE EMPIRE IN AD 271

Source: Oxford University Press

SOURCE 19 The Palmyrene Empire at its height in AD 271

In the late AD 260s, when Rome was preoccupied with struggles over the succession, Zenobia took advantage of the situation to launch a campaign into Egypt, an important province of the Roman Empire. This was a provocative act because Rome relied on Egypt for its grain supply. Zenobia's general Zabdas led the Palmyrene forces, which were eventually driven out of Egypt by the Roman army. The Roman pursuit of the Palmyrene army into Syria was stopped by a successful counterattack in which the Roman army was defeated and Egypt became part of the Palmyrene Empire. Zenobia then took possession of the rest of the Levant and some parts of Asia Minor by either military or diplomatic means. By AD 271 the Palmyrene Empire had reached its height (see Source 19).

Zenobia and Rome

Despite Zenobia's establishment of an empire in opposition to Rome, it does not appear that she envisaged a complete revolt from Rome. The succession issue in Rome had been solved in the person of Emperor Aurelian, and Zenobia paid him due homage by including his name in inscriptions and official correspondence. She also issued coins from Antioch bearing both his image and that of her son, Vaballathus, as joint rulers of Egypt. Aurelian is called *Augustus* (Emperor), while Vaballathus is called variously *Rex* (King), *Imperator* (Commander) and *Dux Romanorum* (Leader of the Romans).

SOURCE 20
A Roman **antoninianus** bearing the image of Zenobia as empress and her title, *Augusta*

antoninianus
an ancient Roman coin originally worth 2 denarii

However, during AD 271, Aurelian's portrait disappeared from coins and was replaced with coins bearing the names of Vaballathus and Zenobia with the imperial titles *Augustus* and *Augusta*. This was done without permission from Rome since the Roman imperial family were the only ones allowed to use these titles. Presumably from this time, the break with Rome was seen as irretrievable and Zenobia was making a clear statement that she meant to rule an eastern empire.

Revolt from Rome

By AD 272, Aurelian was ready to take on Zenobia and reclaim Rome's eastern provinces. He marched on the Palmyrene Empire, sending another force to recapture Egypt. The Roman army marched through Asia Minor meeting little resistance. The Palmyrene army, led by Zabdas, was defeated at Antioch, and Aurelian marched further south to meet Zenobia at the Battle of Emesa (modern Homs). The Palmyrene army of 70 000 had initial success, but then withdrew to Palmyra to prepare for a siege. The Roman army blockaded the city's food-supply routes. Aurelian sent a letter to Zenobia demanding her surrender, along with all of her jewels, gold, silver, silks, horses and camels. Source 21, quoted in the *Historia Augusta*, is Zenobia's reply.

DRAFT

SOURCE 21

'From Zenobia, Queen of the East, to Aurelian Augustus. None save yourself has ever demanded by letter what you now demand. Whatever must be accomplished in matters of war must be done by valour alone. You demand my surrender as though you were not aware that Cleopatra preferred to die a Queen rather than remain alive, however high her rank. We shall not lack reinforcements from Persia, which we are even now expecting. … If those forces, then, which we are expecting from every side, shall arrive, you will, … lay aside that arrogance with which you now command my surrender …'

Unknown, *Historia Augusta*

Zenobia's fate

The reinforcements from Persia mentioned by Zenobia in her letter to Aurelian never arrived. She fled Palmyra on a camel intending to reach Persia and beg for help. Aurelian sent cavalry to intercept her, and she was captured trying to cross the Euphrates River. Zenobia, Vaballathus and members of the Palmyrene court were put on trial in Emesa. Most of the latter were executed, but Zenobia and her son were taken to Rome. Her subsequent fate is unclear as the sources disagree about the extent of her punishment. There is some agreement, however, that Zenobia was paraded through the streets of Rome as part of Aurelian's **triumph** in AD 274. It is also possible that Aurelian permitted Zenobia and her family to live in Rome and some sources even write of her remarriage.

triumph
a Roman general's ride into ancient Rome after a victory

With Zenobia's defeat came the end of Palmyra's brief ascendancy. When another rebellion broke out in Palmyra in AD 273 and 600 Roman archers stationed in the city were slaughtered by the Palmyrenes, Rome retaliated. Large numbers of the population were executed and parts of the city were destroyed.

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15.8 Check your learning

1. Find out about Dido of Carthage and Cleopatra VII of Egypt. Why would Zenobia have claimed a connection with these women?
2. Research the historian Zosimus (c. AD 490) and the *Historia Augusta* (c. 4th century AD). How far are we able to trust the information these sources provide on Zenobia?
3. The coins of Zenobia and Vaballathus are examples of their appropriation of Roman symbols and titles. Look for images of both sides of these coins and research their significance.

15.8 Profile

Palmyra's significance in the modern world

After the defeat of Palmyra by the Romans in AD 273, the city continued to function, but on a greatly reduced scale. Trade continued along other routes that had been in use even when Palmyrawas a significant hub on the Silk Road. The city was partially restored by Emperor Diocletian about 20 years after its defeat by Aurelian, becoming a military outpost of the Roman Empire. Since the conquest by the Muslim army in the 7th century AD, Palmyra has remained part of the Middle East to this day.

In recent years, Palmyra has featured in world news as a casualty of the Syrian Civil War.

Since 2015, several of the buildings featured earlier in this chapter no longer exist, or are very badly damaged. Possession of Palmyra has passed from the Syrian Arab Army to militant forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and back again.

The impact on Palmyra has been substantial. In 2015, ISIS militants destroyed the temples of Baal Shamin, Bel and Elahbel, and the Monumental Arch. In 2017, following their reoccupation of Palmyra, ISIS further destroyed the Tetrapylon and severely damaged the façade of the Roman Theatre. Funerary sculptures were also damaged by a hammer attack. Tragically, Khalid al-As'ad, Palmyra's head of antiquities, was publicly beheaded in August 2015 for refusing to reveal where he had hidden priceless artefacts that he had removed from the city for safe-keeping.

International concern for the fate of Palmyra and its people has been expressed in many forums. For example, solidarity and support were shown in the 3D replica of the Monumental Arch erected in Trafalgar Square and elsewhere around the world.

Zenobia in the modern world

Zenobia's critical role in the fortunes of ancient Palmyra has ensured her survival into modern times, albeit as a figure of legend. Works such as the *Historia Augusta* and Edward Gibbon's history of the Roman Empire, in which she appears prominently, have contributed to these romantic representations. In these works Zenobia is depicted as a great warrior queen who, like Boudicca and Cleopatra before her, took on the might of the Roman Empire and nearly prevailed.

The intellectual and cultural **milieu** of her court has been a model for much later monarchs such as Catherine the Great of Russia. Zenobia has inspired many in the artistic world and while she is known in the West, she is more prominent in the Middle East. Here she is a heroine and a national symbol. She appears in books, in operas, on banknotes and in television series. Like many romantic historical figures, there is a Zenobia for everyone.

milieu
social environment

In Source 24, the great 18th-century English writer of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon, offers the following assessment of Zenobia.

SOURCE 22 *Queen Zenobia's Last Look Upon Palmyra*, a painting by Herbert Schmalz, 1888

SOURCE 23 Anita Ekberg as Zenobia in the 1959 Italian film *Nel Segno di Roma* (or *Sign of the Gladiator*)

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SOURCE 24

Modern Europe has produced several illustrious women who have sustained with glory the weight of empire; nor is our own age destitute of such distinguished characters … Zenobia is perhaps the only female whose superior genius broke through the servile indolence imposed on her sex by the climate and manners of Asia … She claimed her descent from the Macedonian kings of Egypt, equalled in beauty her ancestor Cleopatra, and far surpassed that princess in chastity and valour. Zenobia was esteemed the most lovely as well as the most heroic of her sex. She was of a dark complexion … Her teeth were of a pearly whiteness, and her large black eyes sparkled with uncommon fire, tempered by the most attractive sweetness. Her voice was strong and harmonious. Her manly understanding was strengthened and adorned by study. She was not ignorant of the Latin tongue, but possessed in equal perfection the Greek, the Syriac, and the Egyptian languages. She had drawn up for her own use an epitome of oriental history, and familiarly compared the beauties of Homer and Plato under the tuition of the sublime Longinus.

Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

15.8 Profile tasks

1. How is Zenobia represented in Sources 22, 23 and 24?
2. What possible evidence might each be drawing on to produce their representation?
3. To what extent do these representations reflect the perspectives of the composers and their times?
4. Find other modern representations of Zenobia, e.g. the sculptures of Harriet Hosmer, *The Chronicle of Zenobia* (2006) by Judith Weingarten, or the painting *Queen Zenobia Addressing her Soldiers* by Giambattista Tiepolo. Interrogate these representations with the same questions you have used for the sources in this section.
5. Watch part of *Nel Segno di Roma* by entering 'Sign of the Gladiator 1959' in your browser.
6. Investigate the present state of Palmyra. There are many online news reports.
7. Using what you have learnt in this chapter and in the Profile section, the suggestions in Source 24 and any others you think relevant, construct a response to the following question: 'Account for the significance of Palmyra in its own time and in the present.' (Account for: state reasons for, report on.)

   To help you plan your response:

   - identify the aspects of the topic you will address
   - use these aspects to structure your answer
   - state reasons for the significance of Palmyra in ancient and modern times
   - use specific evidence from the sources to support your discussion.

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Chapter conclusion

Palmyra has occupied a strategically important position at many times of its history. An accident of geography has had both positive and negative implications for its development and survival. It benefited from its location on the great ancient trading network of the Silk Road, but it was also at the mercy of the great powers of the East and West. Under Odaenathus and Zenobia, Palmyra enjoyed a brief moment of glory before becoming just another small player in its region. Today, Palmyra has a very different significance in the world as a result of its being caught up in the present conflict in Syria. Its significance has been recognised by its inscription on the World Heritage List but, sadly, that is no guarantee for its continuing survival.

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FOR THE TEACHER

Check your obook assess for the following additional resources for this chapter:

Answers
Answers to each *Check your learning*, *Understanding and using the sources* and *Profile task* in this chapter

Teacher notes
Useful notes and advice for teaching this chapter, including syllabus connections and relevant weblinks

Class test
Comprehensive test to review students' skills and knowledge

assess quiz
Interactive auto-correcting multiple-choice quiz to test student comprehension